

## Observing Ethical Standards

Trade unions are known to subscribe to the promotion and observance of ethical standards in the conduct of business and relations between both employers and employees. By virtue of taking the high road and refraining from washing their dirty linen in public, trade union leaders are in fact tending to practice what they preached. Inasmuch that a perfect world does not exist, there is every possibility that some trade unionists would fall short of the mark in observing the accepted standards of practice.

There are those who engage in the practices of insulting and demeaning behaviour, and do so with a level of impunity. Those who practice such unbecoming behaviour, bring their professionalism, personal integrity, character and even honesty into question. Some trade unionists engage in the business of condemning and humiliation their colleagues, and often so, without justification. Some would contend that this erratic behaviour has its genius in personal jealousies, the determination which an individual has towards capturing public attention, the desperate aim to give the appearance of one's relevance, or simply an inclination of an individual to get their own way. This is simply a sad reflection of any trade unionist who would want to portray that they support the notion of responsible behaviour, but yet would resort to behaviour that is seemingly undermining and discrediting of fellow trade unionists and trade union organizations.

Wherever such practices are known to happen, and where there is a pronounced sound of silence rather than the denunciation and repudiation of the same, this can only lead to the conclusion that such silence is to be taken that there is approval for such inept behaviour. It gives serious cause for concern if trade unionists engage in condensing, maligning behaviour and character assignation. This has the net effect of destroying the image of the labour movement, and in like manner, the respect employers, workers and the general public have for the labour movement.

Trade unionists as human beings are expected to have emotions. This apart, it is wise that they undertake to control their emotions, exuberance, dispositions and even disappointments. The labour movement has been built on the foundation of brotherhood, unity and solidarity. These watch words will mean nothing, if there is

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the will to violate the very principles of the labour movement, and to do so with impunity.

An understanding of what constitutes ethical practice is fundamental to a change of behaviour. Ethical practice is considered to be standards of professional conduct that any profession or organization is expected to uphold. The practice of professional conduct requires that the integrity and values of the profession or organization are respected and observed. It must be emphasized that a breach of confidentiality is high of the list to be denounced. The bottom-line is that acts of unethical behaviour bring about a loss of trust.

Trade unions leaders ought to recognize that they are public figures of whom much is expected. Careful attention ought to be taken of the fact that the “Misuse and inappropriate use of resources or leadership authority undermine the confidence members have in the union and weaken it.” (Employees International Union, SEIU: 2016). To ignore this would suggest that a sense of callousness prevails and that there is no respect for ethics rules of conduct, organizational practices and enforcement standards. Unfortunately, this would give a clear view of the character of guilty individuals.

As a solution, it is desired that trade union leaders follow a code of conduct. There is however the recognition that having a code of practice will not necessary mean that the required result or the requisite behaviour to be portrayed will happen. The critical thing is for each individual to take full responsibility for their action. If all trade union leaders are not to be painted with the same brush, then there should be no reservations in calling out those who engage in unethical practices. Furthermore, the importance of standards, practices, and values are to be promoted and stressed.

In attempting to appear to be a hardworking representative of the people, this does not give license to any trade union leader to be indisciplined, and to violate the very principles of good industrial relations practice to which they subscribe.

In tackling this problem, consideration ought to be given to developing a Code of Ethics or Code of Practice for trade union leaders. This would serve as guide in

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promoting responsible behaviour, regulating behaviour and developing a mechanism to hold trade union leaders accountable for acts that violate the standards of practice.

As a starting point, it is a timely reminder that personal ethics is about exhibiting responsible and acceptable behaviour. Adding to this would be to identify with morals which teach about the principle or right and wrong.